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## The more things change, the more they stay the same? Legislative primary preview shows rare opportunities for Republicans

by Amanda Vinicky

There's no way voters on Chicago's West Side could have forgotten Rep. Derrick Smith's legal troubles when they went to cast their ballots in Illinois' last primary election; it had been a week, to the day, that Smith had been arrested on charges of bribery. Nonetheless, he easily clinched the Democratic nomination and went on to regain his spot in the Illinois House.

Nearly two years later, Smith — who has pleaded not guilty and whose case is ongoing — may not glide so easily back into his seat. He's being challenged by four other Democrats in the 10th House District.

That breadth of competition is an anomaly for this year's General Assembly elections. More common is the amount of competition faced by Rep. LaShawn Ford, the other indicted Chicago Democrat running for re-election: none. While Ford is still fighting bank fraud charges, he need not fight to hold onto his 8th District seat in the March primary, nor in the November general election.

At press time, more than half of the 137 state legislative seats up for election in 2014 are, as in Ford's "race," uncontested.

Candidates who do face competition are likely to do so either in the primary, or in the general election, not both.

Rather, in 12 House districts and one Senate district, the primary is the contest — whoever wins it will win the seat. One primary race to key in on is the Democratic rematch for Chicago's 39th District. Two years ago, Will Guzzardi lost by a mere 125 votes to Rep. Toni Berrios, the daughter of Cook County Assessor and political boss Joseph Berrios.

Candidates in 27 House districts and four Senate districts will get a free pass in the primary and will only face an opponent in the

general election, as is the case in the 112th District. A tight race is File perfected Between Republican and the Democrats' sole nominee, school superintendent Cullen L. Cullen of Edwardsville.

Political analyst and attorney Russ Stewart says the electoral landscape leaves Republicans with slim chances to cut into the super-majorities Democrats captured in both chambers of the General Assembly in the 2012 general election.

Chances for changeover in the Senate are particularly low — it's telling that one of the three incumbent Democrats set to face a Republican challenger in the general election is Senate President John Cullerton, whose GOP challenger in 2012 got 79 votes to Cullerton's 76,111. Republicans' main (and perhaps only) chance to pick up a seat may be if Moline firefighter Neil Anderson can best incumbent Sen. Mike Jacobs in the general election.

At the same time, as the Chicago suburbs increasingly drift from the GOP, the party may have to worry about holding onto the seat Sen. Kirk Dillard of Hinsdale is vacating as he aims to grab the Republican nomination for governor. The Democrats' sole candidate is Suzanne Glowiak of Western Springs, who could wind up facing a bruised GOP candidate come November, given that the 24th District's Republican primary is apt to be the most contentious primary Senate race. State Rep. Dennis Reboletti of Elmhurst, who cannot run again for his House seat because of residency issues, will battle Chris Nybo, a one-term state senator also from Elmhurst whose former district was erased during redistricting. Nybo ran in 2012 under the new map against Dillard, and though he lost that primary, Nybo says the groundwork laid then will boost his chances this time around because it gave him the "opportunity to be out there, getting to know these communities" in areas not covered by Reboletti's current House district.

Stewart says the lack of competitive races in the Senate will ultimately help Cullerton solidify his hold on the chamber, not just

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February 2014 # Illinois Issues

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If there's a common observation regarding Gov. Pat Quinn's future, it's this: He's one darn lucky guy.

We know the story: He faced the most formidable of challengers — the well-financed and personally popular Lisa Madigan as well as Bill Daley, who comes from another big Chicago family name with plenty of connections.

Then the Metra scandal broke, with allegations from Metra CEO Alex Clifford that he was forced out because he refused to acquiesce to clout hiring requests. It included an entanglement with Illinois House Speaker Michael Madigan, who asked the agency to give a campaign worker a raise, and then withdrew the request.

Days later, Lisa Madigan pulled out. Daley pulled the plug not long after.

So here we are.

Quinn faces no major opposition in the Democratic primary election, allowing him to raise money unopposed while four Republican candidates battle each other for the nomination.

But the Republican primary battle thus far has been lopsided.

Venture capitalist Bruce Rauner has far outraised his three opponents — combined. Before the new year, he already had spent more than \$2 million on TV ads. Aside from having his own millions to tap for the campaign, he's managed to build loyalty among the biggest GOP donors, not to mention his circle of fellow North Shore millionaires.

Right now, Rauner is working to cultivate an image of inevitability, aiming his TV ads directly at Quinn and ignoring the fact that he first must win a primary race.

Here's a guide on who's who in the gubernatorial election in 2014.

photograph courtesy of the Rauner campaign website



**Bruce Rauner:** If social media is any barometer, Rauner is working it. He often pays to "promote" his tweets, meaning they show up at the top of users' Twitter news feeds.

On December 13, his account tweeted: "Are you ready for me to hammer down Springfield politics? Retweet if you are."

It generated more than 100 retweets, a nice number when you compare it with his competitors. But it's clear that Rauner rattles more people — and not in a good way.

One Twitter user responded: "Did you buy that hammer with the rich fees you got managing IL pension money ... Hypocrite."

That's one weakness that will follow the Winnetka Republican. The same person who is railing against union control of Springfield

http://illinoisissues.uis.edu/ **#** Illinois Issues **#** February 2014 **21** 

for this election but well into the future, "So all of this money Cullerton has, he won't have to spend much of it to defend his super-majority. That won't be overturned anytime soon," Stewart says.

Stewart likewise predicts that House Speaker Michael Madigan will have no trouble defending Democrats' prowess in that chamber, thanks in part to the legislative districts that Democrats drew to their advantage. "Madigan designed the map with demographic precision to guarantee that he had at least 60 to 65 safe seats," Stewart says.

Nonetheless, there are dozens of actual races in the House, such as one for the 40th District seat vacated by former Rep. Deborah Mell when she took the place of her father, Dick Mell, on the Chicago City Council. The elder Mell's longtime former top aide, Jaime Andrade, was appointed as Deb Mell's replacement, but despite the backing of that powerful, political lineage, Andrade faces the most competition in any legislative race: He's one of seven Democrats in the running.

Most of the 14 open House seats, though, are in districts currently represented by Republicans. Voters in a dozen GOP districts won't see an incumbent's name on the ballot, thanks mostly to a waterfall of Republican representatives retiring or seeking higher office.

Stewart says Republicans are leaving in droves because their minority status has rendered them "totally, completely irrelevant. They're like a bunch of eunuchs in Springfield."

The trend could leave House Republicans vulnerable, forcing House Minority Leader Jim Durkin to defend the caucus' current position, even as he seeks to regain relevancy by attempting to gain the single additional seat needed to knock Madigan's House Democrats from their veto-proof perch of 71 members.

Republican Rep. Ron Sandack of Downers Grove says GOP voters should keep that reality in mind when they take a primary ballot.

Sandack was one of four Republican legislators to vote for the rew same-sex marriage law, a vote Sandack says was motivated by his conscience and not by politics. But he may pay for it politically.

Sandack faces a primary challenge in the 81st District from Keith Matune, a teacher from Downers Grove whose bid has also received a financial boost from the conservative Family-PAC. While other incumbents (on both sides of the aisle) are facing challenges connected to their support for same-sex marriage, this could be the bellwether. Family-PAC appears poised to make Sandack its poster-child for political punishment.

"We will continue to do everything that we possibly can to retire him from public office," Family-PAC's director, Paul Caprio, says of Sandack.

Caprio is smarting from Sandack's reversal of position on same-sex marriage. Family-PAC helped Sandack narrowly best a primary opponent in 2012 after Sandack had written in a Family-PAC questionnaire that he would support amending the state Constitution to define marriage as between a man and a woman.

Sandack says his evolved stance on same-sex marriage and his votes on other issues, such as his support of the new pension overhaul, show that he is a "difference maker" who "can deliver and understands the real world" — a world in which Democrats control Illinois government. It's a reality, he says, that social conservatives who are focused on single-issues such as same-sex marriage don't understand.

"It doesn't help when we send ideologues, dogmatic people ... who have no understanding of the reality that is Springfield. It just perpetuates our party's problem," Sandack says. "I think my race is indicative of the struggle my party has with itself."

Amanda Vinicky is Statehouse bureau chief for WUIS radio in Springfield and Illinois Public Radio.

reform compromise. This tenow kepta Senate, Dillard, voted against it, and Rutherford spoke out against, it. From his remarks the night of the vote, it's clear Brady will use his vote as a way to stand out from his competitors.

"Running for governor requires making tough decisions. It requires leadership, not standing behind a press spokesman or staying silent, as my three opponents in the Republican gubernatorial primary have done," Brady said in a statement. "The spokesman for Bruce Rauner, one of my opponents, talks about 'insiders' keeping the public in the dark on the details of the bill. There is nothing in this legislation that has not been discussed and debated publicly, including during pension reform debates on other proposals last spring. If Mr. Rauner were to talk about 'insiders,' maybe he could talk about his connections with [convicted political insider] Stuart Levine and Ed Rendell and his pension business."

photograph courtesy of the Dillard campaign



Kirk Dillard: The longtime state senator from Hinsdale has the backing of one of the most popular Republican governors in

Filed on 02/18/14 in TXSD Page 6 of 7

**Pat Quinn:** Quinn is rolling into the new year a different governor than he was one year ago. He now can point to two major initiatives he pushed through Springfield — pension reform, which Quinn has promoted as his top issue for the past two years, and signing same-sex marriage legislation. By doing both, he managed to change the narrative that was unfolding of a do-nothing, ineffective leader.

In a surprise political move, Quinn tapped former Chicago schools chief Paul Vallas as his running mate. Vallas has made many friends — and many enemies — since his days working under the Daley administration. Choosing Vallas seemed to violate the "do no harm" qualification of a lieutenant governor. But it was seen as a sign to neutralize Rauner in his push to revamp education in Illinois.

"I've known Paul Vallas for 30 years, and he's never been shy about fighting for education, reform and opportunities for working people," Quinn said when he made his announcement. "We have made great progress these last few years, but serious challenges remain, and our mission is not yet accomplished. Paul is an independent problem solver with a proven record of reform. He will be a strong lieutenant governor for the common good."

Choosing Vallas, much like advancing pension reform, dilutes an argument that Quinn is in bed with union bosses — at least not public employee union bosses. Quinn remains a campaign beneficiary of SEIU and Illinois trade unions.

Natasha Korecki is a political reporter at the Chicago Sun-Times.

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David J. Bradley, Clerk of Court Clerk, U.S. District Court Southern District of Texas FILED FEB 1 8 2014

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